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AUTHOR Wilson, LaVisa Cay; Headley, Neith
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ABSTRACT

In eight very brief sections, this booklet for beginning or prospective child caregivers provides a basic orientation to essential elements of out-of-home child care services. Child care programs, nursery schools, kindergartens, and the Head Start program are described and 10 features of a good program for young children are specified. Cooperation between home and school and ways to involve parents are discussed. Subsequent sections indicate the range of program providers, including individuals, agencies, and businesses; list basic qualifications of teacher/caregivers; point out three ways programs for young childen are financed; and describe various program locations. The concluding section discusses licenses required for child care programs and areas of program operation usually regulated by law. (RH)

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Working with Young Children

LaVisa Cam Wilson and Neith Headley

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Working with Young Children

In caring for young children away from their own homes, you help them get acquainted with the world.

Through you, they should learn
- ☐ that the world is a friendly place with other adults who want to help them.

Through you, they should experience
- ☐ how to play with children their own age and size
- ☐ how to express their growing individuality and independence within a group.

Through you, they should discover
- ☐ that the world is interesting and full of things to learn.

THE NEED for child care has never been greater. The number of women in the work force has been rising steadily: today more than half the wage earners are women. More women with young children are working because their income is needed to provide necessities for their family. Further contributing to the need for child care is the growing number of single-parent families.

Even if the mother or other relative is at home, children benefit from a nursery school or kindergarten program planned with their needs in mind. Research by psychologists interested in children (Bloom, Hunt, Piaget and others) has shown that much learning takes place in early childhood. Nursery school and kindergarten are considered by some to be a necessity rather than a luxury.

WHAT PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Child Care is needed for children during their parents' working hours. Child care programs have been developed for infants, preschoolers and school-age children who need regular care for certain hours or a full day. Many day care programs are full day; a few allow hourly care or drop-in care, such as Mothers' Day Out and day care centers in shopping centers. Before-and-after-school programs provide care for children up to 14 years of age not only during the school year but also summer and other school holidays; these programs may be located in school buildings, centers or homes. Evening and night care requires special space and equipment for sleeping children.

Nursery Schools provide group experiences for children outside the home. Usually they are half-day programs for two to three hours. In some programs 2-year-olds attend two mornings a week, 3-year-olds three mornings a week, and 4-year-olds five mornings a week.

Kindergartens for 5-year-olds are full-day or half-day programs. Some are private and are held in churches or private schools. Most public school districts now provide kindergartens as part of the regular school program. In an attempt to cut down on expenses, some programs have been reduced to less than full-day, five-day-a-week programs. More research is needed to determine the benefits of various types of scheduling and programming in the kindergarten.

Head Start began in 1965 as a compensatory program for disadvantaged children 3 to 5 years of age. It was designed to provide a wide range of services to the child and the family, among them:

- ☐ education
- ☐ social services
- ☐ health services, including mental health
- ☐ parent involvement
- ☐ career development.

Through the years some of these components have been reorganized and combined, but the initial goal has remained the same. Head Start programs have consistently shown the importance of working with the child *and* the family *and* the community. All interact and affect the total life of the child.

WHAT DOES A GOOD PROGRAM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN INCLUDE?

Children need a balanced program. They need

- ☐ appropriate activities to strengthen their *physical* development
- ☐ stable, supportive relationships to facilitate healthy *emotional* development
- ☐ many interactive experiences with children and adults to permit meaningful *social* development
- ☐ involvement in talking, listening, observing, questioning and thinking to enrich their *intellectual* development.

The teacher/caregiver matches the needs and interests of the child with appropriate activities and experiences to help the child develop and learn.

There should be blocks of time and adequate arrangement of space for

- ☐ *vigorous play* with large muscles: climbing, running, tricycling, building, pushing and pulling wagons and large blocks
- ☐ *quiet play*, rest, and being alone in one's personal space
- ☐ *doing and making*, exploring with such creative materials as easel and fingerpaints, clay and dough, carpentry and block construction; observing nature to learn about leaves, bugs, sand and water
- ☐ *watching and listening*, experimenting with sounds of bells and sticks and one another's voices, trying words and pitch in rhythm, listening to stories and music

- ☐ *playing out* the everyday experiences of home, school and neighborhood
- ☐ *enjoying wholesome snacks* or nutritious meals.

The goals of a program should be reflected in what is done during the day. A full day in day care should be as home-like as possible. The child needs places to be alone and times to choose what to do. A program also includes scheduled activities. Most of the half-day nursery programs plan time for individual play and group experiences. Kindergarten programs offer times for the child to learn by him or herself, with a few friends, and with the whole class. The experiences should be appropriate for 5-year-olds, enriching learning and development. Some kindergartens try to become an early academic first grade. There has been pressure to push reading and arithmetic downward from primary grades to kindergarten, nursery school and day care. Formal group instruction and heavy emphasis on reading, arithmetic and schooling skills may create frustration and failure experiences for many children. Academic pressures should never conflict with the young child's developmental needs.

HOW CAN WE INVOLVE PARENTS?

Effective cooperation with parents is a vital part of good programs for young children. Teachers and caregivers realize that they can give good guidance to children only if they work constantly and consistently with parents. Parents need to have a clear interpretation of the program if they are to help in its growth and to tie the child's school and home experiences together. Close working relationships with teachers/caregivers can help them become more effective as parents.

Parents who choose to assist with the program should feel they are wanted and needed and are important. Their duties, responsibilities and individual contributions to the program should be carefully planned. Through individual conferences or small group meetings, parents and teachers should develop a clear understanding of how each can participate most effectively.

Employed parents have difficulty in participating actively in the daily programs. Much of their attention, time and energy is focused on raising their children and fulfilling their employment responsibilities. Meetings in the evening or during working hours increase pressures on these parents. Nevertheless, there are many ways they can contribute. Parents and caregivers need to discuss how parents can be involved in their child's program.

Nursery schools and kindergartens traditionally have used parents as resource persons; for example, to play the guitar, demonstrate how to use tools, or accompany the group on a field trip. Parent cooperatives require all parents to be actively involved in some part of support to the program.

Head Start has a specific commitment to parent involvement. Parents make policy (Parent Advisory Council), work in regular positions (cook, bus driver, caregiver, component coordinator), and use career development for training that helps them learn new skills for higher level jobs.

WHO PROVIDES PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

A variety of persons and agencies provide programs for young children:

Individuals are day care home mothers, nursery school-kindergarten directors/teachers, or owners of programs.

Parents organize cooperatives which use parent time and talent to provide day care, nursery or kindergarten programs. Usually a paid professional is hired to lead and coordinate the program.

Schools sometimes include day care or nursery school programs in their academic programs in high school home economics classes, technical school and junior college child care courses, and college and university early childhood programs. Some schools also provide day care or nursery school which student-parents can use.

Churches establish day care, nursery schools and kindergartens which use the church's facilities during the week.

Nonprofit organizations and agencies include day care, nursery school and/or kindergarten as a part of their services.

Public agencies, such as social service and education, provide some assistance for child care programs.

For-profit corporations run day care centers, nursery schools or kindergartens as a business.

Business, Industry and Labor are becoming more involved in providing or facilitating child care programs as a service to their employees. Some companies have a day care center in the same building as their business. Some arrange flexible work schedules so parents can be home as much as possible when their child is out of school or during special times of the day. New ideas are being tried as employers and employees recognize the importance of good child care to the welfare of the child, the parent and the company.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TEACHER OF YOUNG CHILDREN?

The quality of programs for young children depends more upon the teacher/caregiver than any other single factor. Workers in child care often are called caregivers, while workers in nursery school and kindergarten are called teachers. All of them need special qualities to provide children with excellent programs.

Good teachers vary greatly in their background and education but all have a high degree of understanding of young children and ability to work effectively with them. There are some basic qualifications, such as

- ☐ a warm and outgoing personality with the ability to establish close relationships with children and adults
- ☐ good health and physical stamina to carry one through full-day programs, working with children "on the floor" and out-of-doors

- ☐ ability to work well with children, other caregivers/teachers, parents and community resource persons
- ☐ acceptance of responsibility to be a good model for children
- ☐ specific training in the understanding and guidance of children from birth to 6 years of age
- ☐ willingness to talk and listen and plan ways to constantly improve the program
- ☐ an attitude of continued professional growth on the job.

HOW ARE PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN FINANCED?

Developing and maintaining programs for young children requires money. There are several funding sources:

Tuition. Parents may be charged the full cost of the service, or a sliding fee scale may be established. Sliding fees are determined by the family's income; those with low family income pay lower fees than those with higher income. Other sources of funding are required to meet the costs of the program when a sliding scale is used. Public schools use state or local taxes to support their kindergarten programs.

Contributions. Parent cooperatives establish guidelines for contributed time and resources as well as money necessary to run their programs. Other day care and nursery school programs solicit volunteers, materials, space (such as a room in a church), and money (United Way, individuals and groups).

Grants and Contracts. Governmental agencies have supported a number of programs—Head Start, child care for WIN (Work Incentive Program) and CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) programs, and funds for child care centers from HUD (Housing and Urban Development) and Community Development.

Some private foundations provide funds for start-up expenses or for demonstration programs.

WHERE ARE PROGRAMS HOUSED?

In setting up any kind of experience for young children, it is very important that the best possible physical surroundings are provided. Of course, we cannot always have "ideal" conditions, but we can see to it that the rooms, toilets, kitchens and playgrounds are safe, healthful and attractive.

Programs for young children may be in a home. A family day care mother provides care for a small number of children in her own home. The children have supervised access to most of the house during their day—kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, playroom, playyard. A nursery school or kindergarten in a home usually is confined to one room especially equipped for the half-day program.

Programs for young children may be in a center. Centers may be in houses, churches, schools, factories or other available space. The centers may be in

remodeled space. Or they may be specially designed and built to meet the goals and needs of the program.

Inside and outside facilities must provide both adequate space and a planned environment to fit the program's objectives.

WHAT LICENSES AND LAWS RELATE TO PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Laws and codes at local, state and national levels must be met in order to operate a program for young children. Minimum standards are set to protect the health, safety and development of children.

Contact your city or county government for information about local regulations. Ask about zoning, fire and health inspection, and taxes.

States require some form of licensing for child care programs. Contact your local office of the state social service or health department and ask them who processes child care licensing. The licensing agency will provide a packet of information as well as access to persons who can help answer questions. The offices of state and federal tax authorities have information concerning incorporating as a nonprofit or proprietary (for-profit) organization.

Though the standards set may differ from community to community and state to state, laws and licensing usually regulate the following areas:

Safety. Are the room, the walls, the materials fire resistant? Can children leave the exits easily? Is the equipment in good condition or is it cracked, chipped, sharp? Are electrical outlets covered? Are children protected from stairs and windows? Is the equipment sturdy and in good condition? Is the playyard planned so children can play without getting in others' way?

Health. Is there adequate square footage per child in both indoor and outdoor space? Do caregivers maintain standards of cleanliness to keep illness to a minimum? Are there nutritious snacks and meals to provide a portion of the child's daily requirements?

Adult-Child Ratio. Is the group of children small enough so that one adult can provide quality care? Usually one adult can care for two to four infants, perhaps five 2-year-olds, or seven 3-, 4- or 5-year-olds. Check your state licensing code for regulations that apply locally.

Education of the Adult. What are the entrance and continuing education requirements? Which jobs require a high school diploma or GED, and which require some college work in early childhood? Are on-the-job training and continuing education available to help teachers/caregivers improve themselves? Are there opportunities to move up a career ladder to a higher level job?

Daily Program. Have goals been set and plans made for enriching experiences for children? Do the activities meet the needs of the child?

Working with young children is rewarding. In enriching their lives, we find we also enrich our own.

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LaVisa Cam Wilson is Editor of *Day Care Journal*, a journal of the Day Care Council of America, and member of the ACEI Early Childhood Committee. Dr. Wilson is a Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama.

A former Kindergarten Teacher, University of Minnesota Professor, ACEI Vice-President and Mary E. Leeper Fellow, the late **Neith Headley** volunteered her services to ACEI as Early Childhood Consultant. Dr. Headley's writings include *Education in the Kindergarten* and *Observations in the Kindergarten* (with Josephine Foster) and *The Kindergarten: Its Place in the Program of Education*.

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